

# Children's attitude toward different types of primary schools in Bulgaria

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**Abstract.** This paper presents the results of research of children's attitude toward education and atmosphere at primary school – what they like, which relationships exist among students and between students and classroom teachers, which activities are available during their free time at school and outside of it, and how they understand and spend their time with others at school. The research is focused on studying personal attitude, feelings of children, as well as choice and real opportunities of different types of schools in Bulgaria. Students share their opinion and ideas of what they would have changed in their own school if they had such an opportunity. The specificity of children's attitude towards public and private schools in the capital and large cities is especially clearly visible. Private schools applying new ideas and pedagogical philosophy are more liberal and focused on children's style in pedagogical interaction, have more flexible organization of educational process and school life inside and outside the classroom. Students' opinion about national and private schools as well as schools located in capital, capital area and provinces differs significantly. This is due to specifics of educational environment and different quality of education in different types of primary schools in Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** school education, children's attitude, students' opinion, type of school.

## 1 Introduction

The research is based on the studies by teachers and psychologists on the problems of urban education in different types of schools in Bulgaria [1-5]; numerous studies on the educational environment conducted recently in different countries [6-9]; works analyzing problems of democratizing education [10-11].

The results of empirical research demonstrate children's opinion and their ideas about education at primary schools in capital, large cities and towns (514 children aged 10-11 studying mainly in the 4th grade). The research sample involved different types of schools in capital and provinces. Out of 36% of municipal schools, 18% were located in capital and

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another 18% were located in capital area; 21% of municipal schools were located in province towns; 21% of national schools and 23% of private schools were located in capital and large cities. The research also aimed at detecting the implementation of ideas for liberal and humanistic education oriented toward children and students' satisfaction with training and organization of their time at school and methods of teaching and evaluation.

**Table 1.** Different types of schools and number of surveyed students.

	<b>School</b>	<b>Students</b>
Private schools in capital / Sofia	9	118
Municipal schools in capital / Sofia	1	90
National schools in capital and large cities	2	106
Municipal schools in capital area	4	90
Municipal schools in province towns	3	110
Private liberal schools in large cities	3	43

The first assumption consisted in the fact that Bulgarian schools were democratic with traditional humanistic orientation in education. This presupposed children's positive opinion and high expectations for school life, teachers and learning. The research hypothesis was as follows: subjective children's opinion depended on type and location of school; this would be especially true for national and private liberal schools in capital due to different type of pedagogical interaction between teachers and students, more flexible organization of learning and school life inside and outside of classroom [12, 13].

## **2 Methods**

Questionnaire developed for the research aimed at underlining the children's opinion about relationships between teachers and students, educational methods, free time activities, personal feelings and wellbeing at school. Bulgarian students had to estimate primary school teachers, education methods in different types of schools and whether they were happy there. Children had to share whether they liked school they attended, wanted to go there, and liked their schoolmates; what they wanted to do in classroom with teachers and during their free time; what they would have changed in school life if they had such an opportunity; ideas what could be done for their own school to make it better. The students could give more than one answer in each question. Then, quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical data was performed.

## **3 Results**

### **3.1 Children's opinion about schools**

Bulgarian children like attending primary schools and enjoy being students. They like their student's role, teachers, forms of education, educational environment, organization of learning in classroom, their free time and fests. Very few of them wanted changing relationships between teachers and students (12%) and methods of teaching (7%). Some students wanted changing themselves for teacher's appraisal and approval, others wanted changing teachers rather than themselves. Grades and exams were important only for 16% of students.

### 3.2 Children’s opinion about teachers and relationships with them at schools

91% of children shared their difficulties and problems with teachers. More than 50% of students perceived their teachers positively and described them as friendly-oriented; at the same time, students respected their teachers. They were sure that teachers could help and, thus, sought for their opinion and advice. Teachers of national schools had the highest prestige: about 3/4th of children appreciated them as authorities, sought for their appraisal and advice (76%). Friendly relationships between students and teachers were significant for students of private schools (61%), where 1/3rd of them (30%) shared personal problems with teachers. This factor was also important for 1/5th of students (20%) in municipal and national schools. In contrast to children in municipal schools (30%), students of liberal private schools stated that they were sure in their teachers’ support (59%).

### 3.3 Children’s opinion about school discipline

School discipline was important factor for more than 50% of students of municipal schools in capital (57%) and capital area (53%). Students of national (42%) and private (34%) schools were of good opinion about discipline at their schools. 40% of students of liberal private schools wanted to improve discipline for changing relationships with teachers. Students (60%) of municipal schools located in provinces had the strongest desire for improving the discipline; 44% of students wanted to reach good discipline by improving their own behavior at school.

### 3.4 Children’s opinion about their feelings for schools and their attitude to school atmosphere

**Table 2.** Students’s assessment of their feelings for schools.

	happy	beloved	satisfied	free	unhappy
Private schools in Sofia	75%	21%	26%	31%	4%
Municipal schools in Sofia	77%	32%	17%	26%	3%
National schools	61%	19%	39%	32%	3%
Schools in capital area	50%	7%	21%	30%	9%
Municipal schools in provinces	63%	12%	13%	11%	2%
Private liberal schools	84%	39%	40%	47%	5%
	68%	21%	26%	29%	4%

Humanistic attitude to children in primary school resulted in their answers. Most of them were happy and liked going to school (65%). Students’ opinions differed depending on type of school and its location. Students of private liberal schools (84%), as well as of private (75%) and municipal (77%) schools in capital, were the happiest ones. Children felt themselves less happy in municipal schools in provinces (63%), national schools (61%) and schools in capital area (50%). This was due to inequality factor and presence of children from minorities. Every 10th student was unhappy, 7% of students answered that they were beloved, every 3rd student felt free (30%), and every 5th student was satisfied (21%). The least beloved students were in schools in capital area - 7%, in provinces - 12%, national schools - 19%, and private schools in capital - 21%. Students felt themselves the least free in schools in provinces (11%), and the most free students were in private liberal schools (47%). Only 30% of students felt themselves free in schools in capital area. This evidenced the specifics of education and predicted inequalities of students in different types of primary schools in Bulgaria.

In general, about 2/3rd of students (65%) were happy at primary school, and every second student (44%) preferred to spend free time with teachers and friends at school. The lowest level of happiness was in students of private schools due to small number of students in a class and teachers and tutors accompanying children on their way home from school. None of surveyed students went to school with fear, and all students wanted to be at school not only for learning but for free activities. "To go to school is to look in the future", as one of 4th grade students wrote.

Due to new philosophy of education and school management that became dominant during the last decades [14-16], 68% of students of primary schools felt themselves happy. However, only half of them felt themselves free (29%), were satisfied (26%) and beloved (21%); and 4% of students were unhappy. The majority of students were motivated and had positive attitude toward learning process and classroom activities. This was typical for municipal, national and private schools in Sofia. Students felt themselves the least free in province schools, there only 3% of students considered themselves being free. 11% of students thought that they had some degree of freedom and 16% of students were able to express their opinion in school without fear and were not afraid of doing this. It evidences that Bulgarian province schools are still characterised by conservative traditions and totalitarian style of school management and education.

### **3.6 Children's opinion about interpersonal relationships**

The interpersonal relationships among students are important factor of their wellbeing and happiness in school. Majority of students described relationships in classes as friendly. 73% and 46% of students of capital and province schools, respectively, wanted to spend free time with schoolmates. Majority of students (59%) of national and private liberal schools in capital mentioned that they collaborated with their classmates in classroom and outside of it and were supported by teachers. This evidenced that students not only felt freedom but also were happy when experiencing collaboration with others. They aimed at reaching common goals being led and supported by teachers. Tolerance, empathy and team building being the most important social life skills were developed in students.

### **3.7 Children's opinion about organization training and learning process centered to students**

Majority (63%) of students of national and liberal schools in large cities liked their own schools because of training and learning process. Fewer students of schools located in capital area and in provinces shared the same opinion (47%). Most of students did not participate in activities performed out of classes. Only 25% of students of schools located in capital area were involved in this type of activities. In contrast to students of municipal schools in provinces (22%), most students of private schools (81%) participated in activities of clubs of interests, workshops, art studios, workrooms, etc. Sports activities were various in different types of schools. Students mostly participated in sports activities in accordance with their wishes and possibilities, the opposite situation was noted only for students of schools in capital (12%).

## **4 Discussion**

Children liked to go to primary schools and this was not an obligation for them. This was not typical only for some children from minority groups that attended segregated schools in outskirts of towns, which was confirmed by other studies [17]. Students finishing primary

schools knew what they had to do and wanted to be better in behavior – this was especially true for municipal schools. However, for every second child this was not significant, especially for children studying in national and private schools.

In general, students were highly satisfied with school life. Going to school was not duty or obligation but pleasure for most of them. Students didn't have fears related with school itself and teachers. Single cases of school violence, aggression, threat, mockeries were met mostly in municipal schools in provinces and were induced mainly by older students or students who were stronger and looked more threatening.

Following new tendencies in education, some schools in Bulgaria have switched to the principle of liberal education. These were mostly schools located in capital and capital area. Private schools located mainly in capital and large cities were established more than 25 years ago. These schools generally implemented new ideas, educational approaches and philosophy that were not typical for Bulgarian system of education. They were considered as a kind of new laboratories for liberal tendencies in reconstruction of Bulgarian system of education.

National and liberal schools in Bulgaria organize training and learning process through play, sports and art activities performed in classroom and during students' free time. Therefore, students's interests in science, art and sports are satisfied and their creative abilities and activities can be developed. Appropriate facilities and equipment combined with highly qualified specialists contribute to students's creative development.

## 5 Conclusion

1. The first assumption consisting in the fact that Bulgarian schools are democratic with traditional humanistic orientation in education has been confirmed for primary schools. Majority of children were of positive opinion and had high expectations for school life and learning. Children of Bulgarian primary schools enjoy going to school and being students mainly due to student's role and love and respect for teachers.
2. Subjective children's opinion depends on type and location of school; this is especially true for national and private schools located in capital and large cities. Private schools following new ideas and educational philosophy are more liberal and oriented toward children due to different type of pedagogical interaction between teachers and students, more flexible organization of learning and school life inside and outside of classroom.
3. Students' opinion about national and private schools as well as schools located in capital, capital area and provinces differs significantly. This is mainly due to specifics of educational environment and different quality of education in different types of primary schools in Bulgaria. Less positive experience was typical only for students from some minority groups attending schools at the outskirts of towns.

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